

# Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office

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Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office  
*Sheriff Wendell Hall*

## PATROL DIVISION DISTRICT 2

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**To:** Captain Jeff Floyd

**From:** Lieutenant Bo Cobb 

**Re:** Supervisory Inquiry SI 14-005 (Sergeant John Thompson)

**Date:** March 4, 2014

**COMPLAINT:** On February 13, 2014, Patricia Lawson, an employee of Whataburger in Navarre, gave a verbal complaint in regards to Sergeant Thompson. Lawson stated that on February 10<sup>th</sup>, while at the Navarre Whataburger, she was issued a written warning by Sergeant Thompson for leaving her vehicle running while she momentarily went inside the store to get her check. Lawson stated the issue of receiving a warning was not the basis for her complaint. Lawson's reported concern was what she described as the "embarrassing" manner in which Sergeant Thompson spoke to her in front of other employees and patrons. Lawson said that at one point she asked her manager, Debra Cook, to come outside to defend her. Lawson said that after a brief exchange, Sergeant Thompson warned Cook that she was impeding his investigation and suggested she could be charged. Lawson stated that the issue of her getting a warning notice was not her reason to complain, but it was how Sergeant Thompson handled the incident and how he spoke to her and her manager.

**FINDINGS:** On February 24, 2014 I spoke with Debra Cook, manager, at the Navarre Whataburger. Her date of birth is 02/25/1959 and she can be contacted at 850-463-8318. Cook told me that she was working on February 10, 2014, and did recall the incident involving Lawson and Sergeant Thompson. Cook stated that Lawson was at the business to get her paycheck. She said that during the time that Lawson was inside the building, Sergeant Thompson walked in. Cook stated that Thompson directed their attention to the vehicle which was parked at the front of the building near the front door. Cook stated that Sergeant Thompson asked who owned the vehicle, and when Lawson stated that it was hers, he asked her to come outside. Cook stated that she observed that the conversation outside appeared to get animated based on the exchange that she observed between Sergeant Thompson and Lawson. Cook said that after a few moments Lawson came back inside of Whataburger and asked her to come outside with her. Cook stated that she asked Lawson what was going on, and was told that the deputy was about to write her a "one hundred and sixty" or a "one hundred sixteen" dollar citation for leaving her vehicle running. Cook stated that she walked outside with Lawson and asked Sgt. Thompson what was going on. Cook stated that she was told that Lawson had left her vehicle running and Lawson was

going to be cited for it. Cook stated that she interjected with Sgt. Thompson that she thought that the parking lot was private property and that he could not issue citations there. Cook stated that Sgt. Thompson told her that he could in fact write tickets there and that's what he was going to do. Cook said that she did not recall as to how Sergeant Thompson told her to go back inside the building, but he did so nonetheless. Cook stated that as she turned to go back inside of the business she heard Sgt. Thompson tell Lawson, "Shut up and go stand over there and I will let you know when I'm done." Cook stated that after Lawson departed the business, Sergeant Thompson went back inside the restaurant and asked to speak to her. Cook stated that she was still upset over how she was spoken to, and she asked Sergeant Thompson if he would "write her a ticket" for her leaving her car running in her own driveway. Cook stated that Sergeant Thompson told her he could "write her a ticket anywhere." Cook said that she then asked Sergeant Thompson if there was another cold weather issue as there had been recently, would he issue citations to everyone who was parked at Whataburger and left their vehicles running due to the cold. Cook said that Sergeant Thompson said "stop talking around me," and then asked her for her supervisor's name due to her acting "unprofessional." Cook also added that she has seen Sergeant Thompson on many occasions at the Navarre Whataburger, to the point of "knowing what he will order so we make it without him asking." She stated that Sergeant Thompson had "always been nice" in the past but "he must have really been having a bad day," when this incident occurred, where she said that he acted "very unprofessional" and was "pulling authority." After speaking with Cook it should also be noted that the Navarre Whataburger has no entrance/exit video surveillance and the only operable cameras are at the registers.

On February 14, 2014, I spoke with Sergeant Thompson regarding a separate incident. In the conversation, Sergeant Thompson stated that he thought I wanted to speak with him regarding "what happened at Whataburger." Sergeant Thompson briefly detailed the incident to me where he described an employee becoming irate after he talked with her about leaving her vehicle running at the front entrance of the restaurant. Sergeant Thompson also stated that a manager also began to argue with him over enforcing parking violations at the restaurant, where he had directed her to go back inside the business until he was finished issuing a warning citation.

#### **POLICY VIOLATION (S):**

One potential policy violation could apply and is listed below under disciplinary guidelines and standards.

#### **DISCIPLINARY GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS:**

SRSO General Order J-003 IV A (001): **Courtesy:** Members shall be polite and courteous in contacts with the public and with co-workers (*Level One Violation*).

**CONTACT COMPLAINANT:** Patricia Lawson advised she did not wish to file a "formal" complaint on Sergeant Thompson regarding this incident. She asked that he be "spoken to" in regards to his handling of this incident to prevent this from "happening to someone else." As part of this inquiry and after being given the above information from Debra Cook, I have not directly spoken with Lawson.



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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** With the consideration that a formal complaint was not filed by Lawson, this incident could be considered as an additional and recent "notification" of Sergeant Thompson's alleged inappropriate manner of dealing with the public. With the possibility that punitive discipline could result due to a separate recently submitted inquiry, I recommend this inquiry to be forwarded to Internal Affairs for further review.

**ATTACHMENTS:** Call History Record (SRSO14CAD013150)

Copy of Warning Citation # 176903 (Lawson/Sgt. Thompson)

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